

WASHINGTON POST

24 Dec 75

Spy Satellites Get False Warning

By George C. Wilson
Washington Post Staff Writer

American satellites designed to warn of a Soviet missile attack set off false alarms recently.

The early-warning satellites stationed in space carry instruments sensitive enough to register the heat from rocket plumes if Soviet missiles were fired from their silos.

Theoretically, such early warning of a possible missile launch against the United States would give decision makers in Washington time to assess the situation, including trying to verify the warnings before going to war.

The satellites recently registered warnings, as they are designed to do, but the heat that triggered them turned out to come from gas fires in western Russia—not rocket launches.

A senior administration official said that an above-ground natural gas transmission line, 40 inches in diameter, broke in several places in western Russia because Soviet technicians let the internal pressure get too high.

Presumably, American satellites took pictures after the infra-red detectors in space pinpointed where in Russia the heat was coming from. Apparently the pictures provided hard evidence for Washington technicians that the gas line had ruptured and caught fire.

However, between the time the first warning signals were received in Washington from the satellites and the time the hard evidence of the gas fires was collected, several possible explanations for the warnings were advanced by American intelligence specialists—including the possibility that the Soviets had trained laser beams on our satellites as part of a program

to blind those that count Soviet weapons.

Such interference with "national means of detection"—satellites which fly over Russia at lower altitudes than the early warning vehicles—would have violated the U.S.-Soviet arms control agreement.

The United States keeps three satellites in space to warn of missile attacks by detecting heat given off during launch.

Intelligence sources said the satellite watching Russia from a spot in the sky over the Indian Ocean first signaled warnings on Oct. 18.

The gas fires set off several other warnings after Oct. 18, apparently because the ruptures and fires raged at different times and places in Russia in both October and November.

The U.S. satellite hanging over the Indian Ocean is designed to detect the launching of Soviet missiles from land while the two other early warning satellites walk a perimeter in space where they can warn of missiles launched from submarines.

23 December 1975

STATINTL

Gas Line Explosion, Not Laser Linked to Spy Satellite Scare

By Fred S. Hoffman
Associated Press

Pentagon sources say the mysterious phenomenon that caused concern about possible Soviet efforts to blind U.S. early warning satellites resulted from flames from a ruptured natural gas pipeline in Russia.

These sources say a study has convinced U.S. experts that the Soviets did not, as first feared, focus laser beams on a stationary American satellite on guard against possible surprise missile attack.

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld told his first Pentagon news conference yesterday that he is now satisfied the Russians have not been experimenting with possible use of high-intensity laser beams to neutralize sensors on U.S. satellites. These infrared sensors are designed

to detect missile launches inside Russian territory.

"IT IS CLEAR to us that there is not a violation (of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms limitation agreement) in that connection," Rumsfeld said.

The 1972 arms agreement forbids both countries from interfering with "national means of detection," a euphemism for satellites that keep watch on the other side's territory.

The new defense chief indicated, without saying so explicitly, that he has seen no concrete evidence of any Soviet violations of the strategic arms accord.

Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt, retired Chief of Naval Operations and now a potential Senate candidate from Virginia, has accused the Russians of cheating on that agreement.

The concern of U.S. intelligence officials was triggered during the fall, when a U.S. early-warning satellite in a stationary orbit more than 22,000 miles in space was illuminated on five occasions by a strong infra-red radiation source from Western Russia.

Although the satellite was not blinded, U.S. analysts said in a secret report early this month that the Russians might be experimenting with laser devices that eventually might be used to prevent detection of missile launches.

AT THE TIME, the intelligence specialists dis-

counted the likelihood that the U.S. satellites had picked up glare from ground fires.

Rumsfeld refused to say what convinced him that the Russians had not aimed laser beams at the U.S. satellite.

But other sources said that the United States obtained evidence that the U.S. satellite had detected fires that had occurred in a series of natural-gas-pipeline breaks.

According to U.S. intelligence, a 40-inch pipeline ruptured because of excessive internal pressures. Sources refused to say how the United States collected evidence of this.

Rumsfeld met with newsmen at the Pentagon for the first full-dress, question-and-answer session since he was sworn in on Nov. 20.